of Question Hour. I will take the view of the House and act accordingly. I will work under the rules. (*Interruptions*).

डा० रत्नाकर पांडेय :*

MR. CHAIRMAN: You move for suspension of Question Hour. I will put it to the vote of the House. If both the sides are shouting, nothing is going to come out of it.

SHRI S. VIDUTHALAI VIRUMBI:*

SHRI V. NARAYANASAMY:*

श्री सभापति : बैठिये। रिकार्ड में कुछ नहीं जा रहा है। (व्यवधान)

MR. CHAIRMAN: Question No. 141.

SHRI A. G. KULKARNI:*

DR. RATNAKAR PANDEY:*

SHRI TINDIVANAM G. VENKATARAMAN:*

SHRI V. NARAYANASAMY:*

SHRIMATI JAYANTHI NATARAJAN:*

MR. CHAIRMAN: Nothing is going on record—neither what you are saying, nor what he is saying nor what they are saying... (*Interruptions*)... Nothing is going on rectrd—not anything outside the is going on record... saying... (*Interruptions*)... Question No. 141.

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

Monitoring of fire fighting operations in Jharia Coal belt in Bihar

*141. SHRI KRISHNA KUMAR BIRLA: Will the Minister of COAL be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have made any efforts to monitor the fire fighting operations in the underground coking coal mines in the Jharia Coal belt in Bihar;

(b) if so, what are the details thereof;

(c) whether this fire is continuing since the last 80 years and there is no technology available to tackle this problem; and

(d) if so, what steps Government propose to take to tackle this problem?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF COAL (SHRI P. A. SANGMA): (a) to (d) A Statement is laid on the Table of the House.

Statement

(a) and (b) 70 fires were existing in Jharia Coalfield of Bharat Coking Coal Limited covering an area of 17.32 Sq. Km. since a long time before nationalisation of Coking Coal mines in 1971. Prior to nationalisation of coal mines, no effective steps were taken by the erstwhile to deal with these fires in a concerted manner. After nationalisation of the coking coal mines in 1971, BCCL have formulated 22 schemes for dealing with major fires in the Jharia Coalfield. Total amount sanctioned for these schemes is Rs. 114.57 crores and these are under different stages of implementation. As a result of these efforts, 5 fires have been fully extinguished. In addition, at 3 sites the protective measures required to deal with the fires have been completed and it will take some more time before these fires are completely extinguished. At another 13 sites also fires have been contained and further work to completely extinguish these fires is in progress. Effective monitoring of the progress of fire projects for improvement of the effectiveness of the control of fire operations is being done.

(c) and (d) The first fire in Jharia Coalfield was reported in 1916. The following methods are being used to deal with fires through the project reports prepared in this regard:—

(i) Trench cutting and its filling with non-combustible matty;

(ii) Water circulation under pressure and cementation;

(iii) Digging out completely and isolation; and

(iv) Inert gas infusion with a view to keep oxygen out.

*Not recorded.

In search of the suitable technology for completely extinguishing the existing fires in Jharia Coalfield, a team of 4 mining engineers was deputed to visit D.S.A., to examine available technology to control the fire. The team has since come back and have indicated that some of the following technologies could be applied to deal with Jharia coalfield fires:—

(i) Use of hydro monitors for quenching the fires followed by excavation of heated debris and coal;

(ii) Drilling under high temperature conditions;

(iii) Infusion of foams through boreholes;

(iv) Use of expanded cement-slurry mix for sealing of the cracks and stabilising the area.

A detailed Action Plan is being worked out by the team with assistance of other experts in the field to control all the fires effectively.

SHRI KRISHNA KUMAR BIRLA: Sir, the fires in some areas of the Jharia coalfields, in the coking coal section, have been there for the last 80 years. At one time it was said that probably no remedial measures have been found anywhere in the world. I do not know how far that is a fact. What is disappointing is that during the last 20 years, since nationalization, only five fires out of 70 fires have been extinguished. At this rate it will probably take decades before all the fires are brought under control and are extinguished. My first question, therefore, is (a) how much coal has been burnt away in the last 80 years; and (b) how much coal is getting burnt every year at present?

SHRI P. A. SANGMA: Sir, it is very difficult to have an exact estimate of how much coal has been destroyed.

AN HONOURABLE MEMBER: Why ... (*Interruptions*)...

SHRI P. A. SANGMA: I am saying, it is difficult to give an exact figure because it has not been measured. But, roughly, our estimate is that 37 million tonnes of coal has been burnt away so far and the value is Rs. 921 crores.

SHRI KRISHNA KUMAR BIRLA: Sir, I come to the second question: Such fires are bound to be there in other developed countries. While going through the reply of the honourable Minister, I came to know that a team has been sent to the United States. Probably, after the visit of the team, a scheme has been formulated and steps are being taken now to bring the fires under control. My second question is: (a) what is the time-frame within which the Government of India are hopeful of bringing the fires under control; and (b) if necessary, will it be possible to bring a team from outside the country also to study the local conditions and advise us on how to extinguish the fires in these areas?

SHRI P. A. SANGMA: Sir, as has already been stated, four of our engineers have been to the United States because similar fires occur in the United States; they have the expertise and they have been successful in putting out the fires in their mines. Therefore, we approached the Government of United States. They were very kind and, recently, four engineers have been them. They have spent two weeks discussing with them and also visiting the fires, where they have been successful. They have just come back. Then again it is not merely a question of technology but it is also a question of money. Therefore, the team met the World Bank people also in Washington. This will be followed by a team of experts in the World Bank, and experts mainly from the United States and also other countries will be included. They will be here towards the end of January or the beginning of February to make an on-the-spot assessment of the situation, and after that only will we be able to say how much finance will be involved and how much time it would take.

श्रीमती कमला सिन्हा : सभापति महोदय, सरकार ने उत्तर में आपने देखा होगा कि 1916 से ही झरिया कोलफील्डस में आग लगी हुई है और

सरकार ने बताया कि 37 मिलियन टन कोयला अब तक जल चुका है। यह नेशनल वैल्थ का इतना बड़ा वेस्टेज है । इन्होंने कहा कि नेशनेलाइजेशन के बाद से 114.57 करोड़ रुपये सेंक्शन हुये थे इस आग को बुझाने के लिये और सिर्फ 5 जगहों पर ही आग बुझाई जा सकी । इन्होंने एक टीम को अमरीका भी भेजा था, जो वहां से नई टेक्नोलोजी सीखकर आई है । मैं सरकार से जानना चाहती हूं कि झरिया में तो लगभग 80 सालों से कोयला जल रहा है लेकिन झरिया के साथ-साथ लालमटिया कोल फील्ड में भी कोयला जल रहा है तो मंत्री महोदय जो यह नयी फायर-फाइटिंग स्कीम लागू करेंगे, वह केवल झरिया में ही करेंगे या दूसरी जगहों पर भी करेंगे ? अगर वे यह स्कीम झरिया में लागू करने जा रहे हैं तो कितने दिनों के अन्दर वे इस आग को बुझाने के काम में सफल हो पायेंगे ? इसका कोई अंदाजा आपने लगाया है ? इसके लिये आपने कोई प्रारूप तैयार किया है ?

SHRI P. A. SANGMA: Sir, the question relates mainly to Jharia area, and that was perhaps because the Jharia area is the reserve of coking coal. Coking coal is a precious mineral in our country in view of the fact that every year we are importing coking coal worth Rs. 500 crores. Therefore, the urgency of controlling the underground fire is there in Jharia. Similar fires do occur in mines in many other areas including the area which the hon. Member mentioned. Our priority is to put out the fire at Jharia. But when we formulate the scheme, it is not going to be confined only to Jharia, but it is going to cover the whole country.

श्री चतुरानन मिश्र : सभापति महोदय, मंत्री महोदय ने कहा कि शायद यह कोकिंग कोल है । मैं इनको बता देना चाहता हूं कि निश्चित रूप से यह कोकिंग कोल है । यह वही कोकिंग कोल है जिसे आप विदेशों से मंगाते हैं और बहुत सी विदेशी मुद्रा इस पर खर्च करते हैं । झरिया कोयला खदानों की आग समस्या के बारे में कोल इंडिया की तरफ से एक कमेटी बनी थी, मैं भी उस कमेटी का सदस्य था । उस कमेटी ने रिकमेंड किया था कि कैसे इसको रोका जाए । इसमें कई प्राब्लम्स हैं । ऊपर शहर बसा हुआ है, लोग हटने के लिये तैयार नहीं हैं और दूसरी बात यह है कि जो आग लगी हुई है वह असाधारण आग है । अब आप उस कमेटी की रिकमेंडेशन्स को इसलिये लागू नहीं कर सके क्योंकि उसमें धन का सवाल है । कोयले के जलने से राष्ट्रीय संपत्ति की बरबादी हो रही है । अगर इस आग को बुझाने का खर्च कोयले पर बिठा दिया जाये तो कोयले का दाम तिगुना बढ़ जायेगा ।

महोदय, मेरा प्रश्न यह है कि इस आग को बुझाने के लिये क्या भारत सरकार अतिरिक्त धन देगी ? इसके लिये कभी आपने भारत सरकार से मांग की है ? आपके मंत्रालय ने कभी सरकार को बताया कि यह हमारे बूते के बाहर की बात है और यह राष्ट्रीय संपत्ति की बरबादी है इसलिये पूरा राष्ट्र बचाने की कोशिश करे ।

महोदय, मेरा दूसरा प्रश्न यह है कि इन्होंने कहा है कि बाकी जगहों की आग के लिये बाद में देखेंगे । तो क्या ये इंतजार कर रहे हैं कि हर जगह आग बहुत ज्यादा बढ़ जाय तभी इनकी सरकार उसे देखेगी । जहां कम आग लगी हुई है, वहां तो आप तुरन्त कार्यवाही कर सकते हैं । मैं उदाहरण दे सकता हूं कि गिरिडीह में भी ऐसी समस्या है, बोकारो में भी ऐसी समस्या है । जब आग लगी होती है तो पहला काम होता है उसको डिसलोकेट करना, उसको बुझाना । दूसरे यह कि इस खर्च को अलग से मीट करने के लिये भारत सरकार से कहा है क्या? इन दो बिन्दुओं पर मैं चाहता हूं आप स्पष्टीकरण दें ।

SHRI P. A. SANGMA: I can assure the House that the Government is very serious about tackling this problem. It is not only that we have already lost our mineral resources worth almost Rs. 1,000

crores—the exact figure I gave is Rs. 991 crores—but the point is that the coking coal reserve to the tune of 1,864 million tonnes is also in danger. This in terms of value comes roughly to Rs. 45,000 crores. Therefore, we are very serious and we are trying to tackle this problem. The question of money should not be a criterion here. We have explored the possibility of funds. As I said earlier four scientists or engineers who had gone to America had also met the World Bank. The World Bank team along with experts is coming here. It is willing to give funds. There are also other international agencies which are willing to fund this. Even if we are not able to get assistance from the international financial institutions, I can assure the House that as far as this project is concerned, we will take it on a very top priority basis and I do not think money will stand in our way.

श्री चतुरानन मिश्र : मैंने जो प्रश्न किया था उसका जवाब नहीं आया। मैंने यह नहीं पूछा कि गवर्नमेंट सीरियस है या नहीं। 80 वर्ष से आग लगी हुई है। यही तो गवर्नमेंट की गंभीरता का प्रमाण है। मैं जिस बात को जानना चाहता हूं कि वह यह कि क्या आपके विभाग ने अतिरिक्त धन के लिये भारत सरकार से कभी मांग की है कि इसके लिये अलग से फंड सेंक्शन किया जाये ?

Has your Ministry ever demanded money? If so, when and how much?

श्री सभापति : यह भी तो भारत सरकार का हिस्सा है।

He himself is a part of the *Bharat Sarkar.*

SHRI P. A. SANGMA: I have made it very clear that it is such a top priority for us that money is not going to stand in our way. We will find out money and see that this project is through.

SHRI SANTOSH KUMAR SAHU: Coking coal is a very scarce material in our country. As per the Minister's statement at Jharia we have lost almost 1,000 million tonnes of coal. In value terms Rs. 45000 crores worth of coal is lost. After the visit of the expert team and its submitting a report I would like to know if the Government would make some immediate modifications in the action plan. I am saying this because the mines were nationalised in 1971. So, will the Government take some positive steps immediately even depending upon our domestic resources. If so, I would like to know what immediate steps it would take to immediately extinguish the fire.

SHRI P. A. SANGMA: Yes, Sir.

MR. CHAIRMAN: He wants to know what steps. You are taking steps. That he agrees.

SHRI P. A. SANGMA: The hon. Member asked whether the Government would take immediate steps. I said, yes, Sir.

MR. CHAIRMAN: He asked what steps you are taking.

SHRI P. A. SANGMA: The steps that we have taken so far with the estimated cost of Rs. 114 crores, have not worked properly. We must admit that. We have not been able to tackle this problem successfully. That is precisely the reason why we had to look for another technology available in the world. We have now got an assurance from the United States that we are going to get the appropriate technology required to put out this fire. How we are going to do it and what schemes we are going to formulate, we will be able to say only when the expert group comes to India in the month of January-February. It is only after the report that we get from them that the Government will be able to finally formulate its action plan.

SHRI SUNIL BASU RAY: The reply of the hon. Minister does not throw light on the whole aspect. The Minister has said the fire is raging from 1916, but he did not say when exactly the first to contain the fire was taken. Coal industry was and is still under the control of the Government of India through its various departments, particularly through the Office of the DGMS. So,

there cannot be an excuse on this point. I want a categorical reply from the Minister as to when the first effort to contain fire was started in the Jharia Coalfield. After the nationalisation projects were cleared, I agree, but my question is when the first step was taken in this direction. After nationalisation two decades have passed. So, my question is exactly when the first step was taken and what period each containment of fire took. The Statement of the Minister says almost all the 21 fires are in different stages of containment. My question is what was the necessity ot going to USA. I do not know what the difference is between the two sets ot technical procedures suggested and mentioned in this reply. I do not understand what the necessity was of going to the United States when all our mining experts are quite efficient and effective in containing all these fires and they have contained the fire so far. I want a categorical answer on this score also. What was the technical justification for the experts to be sent to USA and what additional knowledge have they brought with them in this respect?

SHRI P. A. SANGMA: This project had started as soon as the coking coal was nationalised in 1971. As I have already stated out of 70 fires that have been detected, 22 projects have been formulated since 1971. As a result of this in five areas the fire has been completely extinguished; in three areas we are about to succeed and in 13 fires we have been able to contain this spread of fire. As a result of this—again it is a rough estimate I should say—we have been able to save 180 million tonnes of coking coal in the country and its value is slightly ovetr Rs. 4,000 crores. Therefore, it is not that we have not done anything in this area. We have tried. The problem now is that it is not only the question of extinguishing the fire, but after the fire has been extinguished, the question of the coal cooling down comes. The heat has to come down in order to enable us to mine the coal. In our technology it so happens that even if the fire is extinguished, it takes, maybe 10, 15 or even 20 years' time to completely wipe out the heat. Therefore, that technology is not very effective. That is the reason why we have to search a new technology. We have got a new technology now. The technology that we are going to bring in from the United States will not only extinguish the fire but will also wipe out the heat soon. Therefore, we will be able to go into the mining activity much earlier after we have extinguished the fire. I am now not in a position to give the entire detail. I will be able to tell the House only this much that when the experts team comes to India and visits those areas and submit its report that I will be able to spell out the details.

SHRI SUNIL BASU RAY: Will the Minister submit the report to this House so that we can know it? It is not only a question of how many tonnes of coal is being burnt, but it is also a question of reclaiming the surface. An entire township will have to be evacuated. That question has not been answered by the Minister.

MR. CHAIRMAN: He is looking into it.

SHRI SUNIL BASU RAY: Sir, we want a definite statement on this action programme.

MR. CHAIRMAN: The Minister is looking into it. How can he give a statement now?

SHRI SUNIL BASU RAY: Sir, since 1916 it is going on. It is not only in Jharia, but it is also in Sindhri in Madhya Pradesh. The same is in Raniganj coalfield. The same is everywhere. This is the main question.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Question No. 142.

*[*The questioner* (*Shri Dhuleshwar Meena*) *was absent.* For answer *vide* cols. 30-31 *infra.*]